

SECTION 2.

Comments From High School Leavers

Why They Left School, What They Are Doing Now, What Regrets and Advice They Have for Other Youth

The high school leavers profiled in this report were asked a number of open-ended questions to learn more about their school leaving experience. They were able to tell us much about why they left high school and what it is like for them now as they try to make it without a high school degree. For many it has been a learning experience that has motivated them to make positive changes in their lives. A number have advice that they would like to pass along to current high school students who might be thinking about leaving school. Other former students are not making positive changes but are continuing the same behavior that probably accounted for their being expelled from school or prompted them to leave. Their comments are included as well. Finally, many of these former students have suggestions that schools might consider to help students like themselves stay in school and graduate.

A selection of the respondents' comments about their school leaving experience are included in the following sections as a way to reveal their side of the story. Parents, teachers, school administrators, and other officials would undoubtedly have another side. It is important, however, to get the students' perspective, as too often it is ignored. For this reason their comments are included here.

Why Did These Youth Leave High School?

These high school leavers describe a variety of reasons for leaving school. No one reason dominates, although disliking school is the most common reason given (16% of all reasons) for leaving school early. A number of factors seem to build on one another until at some point leaving school seems to be the only available alternative. And for many students the actual choice to leave school is not theirs. Because of behavioral or academic problems, or their own or family illness or need for employment, a number of students were encouraged to seek alternatives outside school or were dismissed outright.

When respondents gave their reasons for leaving school, a combination of reasons was commonly given, with 53% of respondents giving only one reason, 34% two reasons, 10% three reasons and 3% four or more reasons for leaving school early.

For the purposes of this discussion, their reasons for departure have been grouped into the following categories: 1) lack of interest, bored, not motivated, 2) absence of help, support, understanding, 3) problems with authority at school or at home, 4) unacceptable